

BONNY OAKS BEGAN ITS WORK IN 1898

Dr. Bachman, Z. C. Patten Among the Institution's Early Friends

BY MRS. WILLIAM S. KEESE, SR.

The statute authorizing the establishment of institutions like Bonny Oaks was enacted by the Tennessee general assembly in 1895. It was modeled after the best laws then found to be in operation. Dr. J. W. Bachman led the investigation of the laws in other states.

The county court lost very little time, and in January, 1896, passed resolutions requesting the Hon. John A. Moon, then judge of the circuit court, and Chancellor T. W. McConnell to appoint four citizens, as provided by the law, who, with the county judge, would serve as trustees. Dr. Bachman, Squire L. W. Bates, J. S. Bell and C. D. McGuffey were named, and they, with Judge Seth M. Walker, served as the first board of trustees.

Mr. Bell and Squire Bates, as a committee, investigated a great many locations and finally, upon the insistence of Squire Bates, decided upon the present site, the Capt. Peak farm. This was in January, 1898. J. C. Kalleen, the first superintendent, opened the institution in February, 1898. His family occupied the Peak home, the present administration building, which was also used as a dormitory for boys and housed the school. His daughter, the present Mrs. Claude Sprague, was the first teacher. The farm contained 250 acres.

Land Given by Z. C. Patten

In July, 1899, the late Z. C. Patten purchased from Dr. J. M. Trimble his home and 135 acres of land, adjoining Bonny Oaks, and deeded it to the county as a home for girls. Some years later Mr. Patten established a trust fund in which Bonny Oaks shared. The proceeds from this fund are used in assisting outstanding and worthy girls in further educational advantages.

The Trimble home was used as a dormitory for girls until 1913, when the county built the brick dormitory now standing, known as the Z. C. Patten Home for Girls. Similarly, the administration building had been used for the boys until the boys' dormitory was built by the county in 1910. The little white chapel, known as the Scott Hyde memorial, was erected in 1909, largely through the generosity of two friends of Dr. Bach-

man, Dr. H. Strayer, of Chattanooga, and "Aunt Mary" Rice, of Honolulu.

During the World war, fire destroyed the Negro buildings and the boys were housed temporarily in the present administration building, until the large building across the road was constructed. Building expansion then ceased for a long time.

In 1929 Fred Robinson was appointed on the board of trustees, and through his efforts an appropriation was secured and the present school building was erected at a cost of \$8,000.

Keese Took Charge Twelve Years Ago

In 1926, the Rev. William S. Keese, after some twenty years ministry in Chattanooga, became superintendent of Bonny Oaks school. Buildings were entirely inadequate and he began at once to endeavor to sell anew Bonny Oaks to the general public.

The promising youth who were there and the many others of the county who were in need of such service as Bonny Oaks could render finally secured from the public at large a very gratifying interest. In 1937, through the efforts of Judge Will Cummings and Congressman Sam D. McReynolds, a PWA grant of approximately \$150,000 was obtained and four new buildings erected.

These new buildings, a 'teen-age girls' home and a dormitory for older boys, a dormitory for colored girls and a laundry, were erected and equipped. At the same time, the colored boys' dormitory was completely remodeled. These expansions enabled the institution more nearly to offer sufficient space for some 240, and provided the new feature of a home for colored girls.

Bonny Oaks, situated about nine miles east of Chattanooga, along the Southern railway, is an institution of which Hamilton county is justly proud, and is recognized throughout the state as second to none in its service to youth.